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TRANSLATION OF AN ASSYRIAN PARABLE.

By Colonel C. R. CONDER, LL.D., R.E.

A TABLET, described by George Smith as a fable of the Horse and Ox, and translated by M. Alfred Boissier ("Proceedings Biblical Archaeological Society," January, 1899), is of interest as showing the same appreciation of the war horse in Assyria that we find in the Book of Job. It is written in rude Sapphics, unrhymed, and is unfortunately much damaged. It appears to have begun with the prayer of some king for rain, and gives a poetical description of the Spring time following. The ox and the horse then compare their lives, each in favour of his own. The whole of the legible part may (with a few restorations) be thus rendered, in something like the metre of the original:—

His fields are flourishing, his [land] rejoices.
 Swamps and moist places [blossom] around.
 Highlands [are streaming], flooding the country.
 Depths being poured forth, overflow the shore lands.
 Covering the country, they dig and they till it.
 And where men till not, flocks are returning.
 In all the pastures, herbs now are sprouting.
 In Earth's waste places, bursting from below.
 Food of flocks increases, and fields are flourishing.
 The Ox and the Stallion, there are companions.
 Fat are their bellies, on account of pasture.
 Gladly their hearts rejoice, for there is plenty.

THE OX.—Spake the Ox talking, saying to the Stallion
 Famous in battle—

"I perceive I am, happy in fortune.
 "From the year's end to end, I can look for pasture,
 "Floods being dried for me, deep pools are welling.
 "Swamps and moist places, are becoming gardens.
 "Depths being poured forth, overflow the shorelands.
 "Highlands are streaming, flooding the country.
 "Covering the country, they dig and they till it.
 "Places they till not, plenteous showers water.
 "Prudently the peasant, turns
 "Crying 'they grow for me,
 "But the horse masterless, roams as a wanderer.
 "Never stays in fields none waters
 "Therefore for lack of

THE HORSE.—

" Fate is appointed
 " Copper well proven
 " For my clothing clothes me,
 " Me no master mounted,
 " For no King or Chieftain, no prince or great one,
 " Came to the plain."

THE OX.—Spake the Ox talking, saying to the Stallion
Famous in battle—

" Canst thou without calling,
 " Whom in thy battles,
 " Strongly the chariot, I complete with harness.
 " From my skin a toughness, [fit for the harness].
 " From my tendons toughness, [fit for the bowstring].
 " Comes for the warrior, who the quiver [carries].
 " Terrible and shining, he draws forth [the arrows].
 " Spurs of thy masters,
 " Seest thou not the journey, is difficult [and weary].
 " Blinded are thine eyes
 " Not the way thou goest, [leading to] pastures.'

THE HORSE.—Spake the Horse talking, to [the Ox] saying—

" In my worth delighting,
 " Spur
 " Weapons
 "
 " Heart of a lion,
 " Crossing the river,
 " On mountain pathway,
 " Thou, O bull, must struggle, [tugging] the water wheel,
 " In all thy labour, unconsidered [ever].
 " Fed on dusty herbage,
 " While the horse is striving

THE OX.—Spake the Ox talking, saying to the Stallion—

" As regarding water wheels, what you say is

This is described as the first chapter of a poem on Istar, belonging to the palace of Assurbanipal (7th century, B.C.). The fable evidently contrasts the duties of the soldier and the peasant, and the comparative glory and utility of their lives. It is a pity that the last words of the Ox are lost. Possibly he is supposed to have concluded, "What you say about water wheels is true enough." I have ventured to make some minor alterations in the translation, on the authority of the meanings given by Dr. Schrader for certain Assyrian words, and for other reasons.